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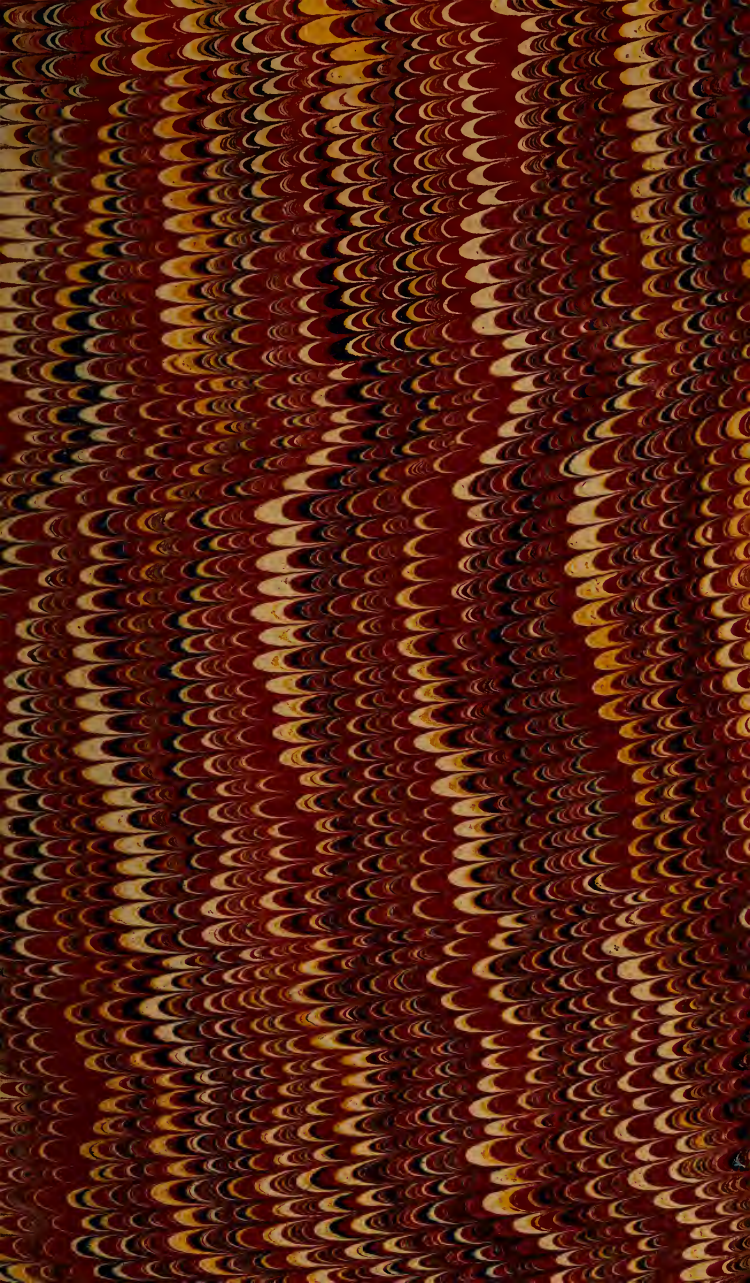
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CULTURE:

A POEM

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

MERCANTILE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

AT THE ODEON, IN BOSTON,

OCTOBER 3, 1843.

BY GEORGE LUNT,

Honorary Member of the Association.



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TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE
BOSTON MERCANTILE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

The very purposes of whose institution prove their interest in higher objects than the mere accumulation of wealth, and who well exemplify the character of a City, always distinguished for cultivation and liberality,

This Poem,

DELIVERED AT THEIR REQUEST,

Written under the deep conviction, that the sentiments it inculcates can, in no city or time, be wholly out of place, and published in the firm hope that it may bear no ineffectual testimony against an age eminently worldly and unspiritual,

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH GREAT RESPECT AND ESTEEM,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

‘For a Satire, as it was born out of a Tragedy, so ought to resemble his parentage; to strike high and adventure dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons; and not to creep into every blind tap-house, that fears a constable more than a Satire.’ — *Milton. Apology, &c.*

Oh, it is false! we are not stocks and stones,
Nor virtue is not yet that fabled thing
That folly would persuade us. Still on high,
Great Justice, in his chancel throned supreme,
Notes our offences for the day of doom!

New Play.

1867

Received of the Treasurer of the State of New York
the sum of \$1000.00
for the year ending 1867

Witness my hand and seal this 1st day of January 1867

John W. Foster
Treasurer of the State

PREFACE.

It was long ago alleged by Mr. Pope, that his chiefest ambition was to be a successful writer of philosophical poetry; regarding it in fact, as the highest style of human composition. The exact degree of coincidence between his aspirations and his essays the world has never yet fully agreed upon. The reasonableness of the existing doubts on this subject, is, I fear, justified by the fact, that Mr. Pope, with a more honest purpose than many other moral philosophers, (so called,) was himself partially deceived, and undertook to build upon 'stubble' a superstructure, which can be substantially raised and sustained only on a very different sort of foundation.

In regard to his estimate of the true value of philosophical poetry, when any poetry is to be considered valuable, I believe him to be perfectly correct. Since moral excellence is manifestly the object of human existence, that species of writing which best exhibits and enforces our duties and allures to their fulfilment, must be our most valuable study. The more attractive this can be rendered to those likely to profit by its lessons, through those charms of language and graces of illustration which poetry supplies, the more excellent it must become. The production of this kind of composition in its highest degree, requires many important qualifications; a knowledge of life, the capacity to analyze it correctly, and that power of dis-

crimination between right and wrong, which is by no means so common a gift as is generally imagined. Originally, in Paradise, man knew only the Good. Having unlawfully sought to distinguish between this and Evil, till then unknown, his acquisition has been a source of perplexity and misery to him ever since. It was, however, by their superior ability to illustrate this great interest that poets first acquired their prophetic style; and it may be fairly concluded that they have latterly lost much of their influence upon society, by neglecting their high calling in the pursuit of meaner objects, and *by prophesying smooth things* to a world, which it is their business to spiritualize instead of conforming themselves to its unideal requirements. It may be the part of a novelist to describe life as it is; it is the duty of a poet to present it as it ought to be. The gift of imagination is an exalted endowment; closely allied to Faith, if not one of its principal component parts, and chiefly employed to a worthy end, only in developing and encouraging the best emotions and faculties of our nature. Especially in an age professedly 'practical,' which, if it mean any thing, means an age devoted more or less exclusively to objects of the merest worldly interest, it would seem to become the poet to say something, if he has any thing to say; and to expostulate in his sphere, against a too thorough devotion to pursuits, praiseworthy indeed, and honorable in certain aspects, but which cannot of themselves render life happy, society sound, or liberty permanent.

In fact, if there be any prophetic skill left in poetry, the 'practical age' only exhibits our race in its very worst of all possible conditions; and I confess that I look upon the tone of society as having become very low, since the principle of expediency began to vitiate our perception of Truth, and the spirit of utilitarianism offered us the dregs instead of the wine of Life. If it be inquired of me, whether I expect to amend

these evils by the force of a moral poem, my reply is, that this is none of my concern. Our duty is, upon a suitable occasion, to exert our best powers for the encouragement of better influences; well knowing that no man can estimate the effect of his performances, but equally certain that whatever is in itself honest and true, cannot, eventually, fail of acquiring its due position, and executing its appropriate office. Indeed, there is a large class in every community, who might not listen to the more direct and formal application of moral truth, but whose sensibilities are excited, and their minds balanced by the more incidental promptings which poetry may be made to suggest; and the poet often gives expression to many emotions, for which others can find no voice, but which lie nestling and uncomfortable in their bosoms.

It has been said, I know, by those who have thought but superficially on this subject, that 'the day of poetry has gone by.' For my own part, I have not so bad an opinion of the world as to believe it yet to have found

In this lowest deep a lower deep;

for so long as one pure or honorable emotion exists in the human heart, poetry and the things of poetry will continue to exercise some influence upon the character and condition of society. Milton, it is true, hinted in his own day, that he might be

An age too late!

Yet how his own fame brightened long after he had bequeathed it to avenging Time! and what a host of illustrious spirits have subsequently graced and elevated English literature! What is called, in fact, its Augustan era, commenced, as we know, long after Milton had uttered his doubtful suggestion; and we may

suppose it to have been really prompted only by some reflection upon the stormy character of his times, or some sense of personal misappreciation and disappointment. Mr. Burke, with a more observant sagacity, in one of his loftiest flights, announced his own era as 'the age of sophists, economists and calculators;' yet the events which have convulsed Europe, since his time, have fairly outstripped all conception of romance, and perhaps may one day fill the imagination of another Homer.

It is possible, indeed, that some great revolution, of which few present indications are very apparent, may take place, at some future period, in the moral world; when mankind, guided by pure and simple truth, and dwelling in universal peace and love, may less require such incitements to virtue and nobleness, as poetry inculcates and inspires. But even then, if any devotion waft our souls to Heaven, or any love ally us only too closely to earth; if there be any emotions out of the mere routine of necessary existence, or any desire or enterprise involving the developement of the more exalted impulses of our being, its heart will stir to the promptings of poetry, and its language utter her voice. At least, till such a period arrive, all coldness towards the manifestations of her spirit, only proves the low condition of the general sentiment and feeling, and requires still more earnest efforts on the part of those who look for the moral advancement of man, or who feel in themselves any promptings of ethereal fire, to incite, and elevate, and cheer society on towards a more glorious destiny.

In every stage of human existence, there must always be found a vast difference amongst individuals, in the power of appreciating those impressions, which the poetry of art or of nature is fitted to convey. We may, by a whole life of hebetude, completely close our eyes to every thing which really

constitutes the charm and beauty of life, and which has no little influence upon us even then, in preventing our complete stagnation into brute existence. A poet truly exercising his vocation, so far as he avails to resist or retard the downward tendency of his race, may be fairly regarded as a more valuable member of society than even a worthy packman, like Peter Bell, totally uninitiated into the easily explorable mysteries of things.

A primrose, by the river's brim,
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more,

says Wordsworth's often quoted and pretty stanza. And in truth, it is nothing but a primrose, make the very best of it. But the difficulty is, that to Peter Bell's mind it is not even that. Were it water-colored on paper, in the best boarding-school fashion, it would be the same to him; or rather, in neither phase would he derive from it any pleasurable sensation. If he regarded it at all, he would perhaps in either aspect look upon it but as a trumpety flower, and possibly strike it down in wanton malice, with his packman's staff, as he journeyed on his way. But to what account can a poet turn this delightful manifestation of the bounty of Providence, in furnishing the charms, as well as the mere necessaries of existence? The moment the simple flower attracts his eye, as he leisurely muses upon 'the river's brim,' his mind becomes, as it were, a sort of congregation of primroses, and the associations which primroses suggest. He lives, for the time, in Primrose-hall! To the common eye, it has, perhaps, all the attributes of color and shape, fit to allure a passing glance; to him it brings ten thousand sister-thoughts of perfume, grace, loveliness, and fragility; he is transported in imagination to the 'gardens of Gul in their bloom,' — or

————— that fair field
 Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers,
 Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
 Was gathered.

Mortal and immortal fancies crowd upon his imagination. He becomes for the time, at least, a better, and in every just sense, therefore, a wiser man; and he infuses, in his own way, the results of his speculations, into the secret or open thoughts of millions. Thus is life imperceptibly modified, and existence often controlled, where such things would be least suspected of the most momentary influence.

It is these things which really give the grace and charm to life; which throw a veil of beauty over what might otherwise seem a desert, and variegate it with hill and meadow, stream, valley, and foliage. The world might have been made a very dismal place; instead of the loveliness which surrounds us, all drab-colored and quaker-like, or a bare rock with only soil enough for a potato-patch! And it were perhaps as well so, if we have no faculty or inclination for the enjoyment of something better. Just so in the moral world; it may be all cold, hard delving; or we may soften and elevate our toils with the sweetness of imagined beauty. It is the same indisposition which hardened Peter Bell against the primrose, which leads us to neglect the graces of literature. A simple flower, and the associations which it has recalled, have often, no doubt, preserved many a mind pure, amidst many inducements to contamination. Poetry thus awakens the slumbering sentiment of virtue in our bosoms. To object to it; to regard it as trifling or worse, is as unreasonable as to make war upon primroses; or, like Milton's gloomy and desperate hero, to hate the very sunbeams which illuminate and gladden the face of creation. Imagination is as proper a quality of the mind as, I will not say, Reason, — for I

conceive the rightful spirit of Imagination to be the highest developement of Reason,—but as common sense employed about the absolute necessities of existence. And whoever has much experience of life, will conclude, that in a greater or less degree, it is a much more common quality of the human mind. Its enjoyment, therefore, its cultivation, its just exercise, about suitable objects and on proper occasions, would seem to be natural and reasonable, and whatever addresses it, in the spirit of truth, must be in the highest degree desirable and praiseworthy.

There is indeed a time for all things. The reading of a page of the sublimest or most touching poetry may not aid us in paying a note at the bank, any more than would the gazing at a flower, or a ramble in the fields just before the approach of the fated moment. But the very occupations enumerated may tend to make us have fewer notes there, and the individual and society be very much the gainers in consequence.

Let me not, however, either here or in the text, be understood as desiring to discourage a just attention to the ordinary pursuits and business of life; in themselves honorable and necessary, and the administration of which Providence has entrusted to us, as the means of developing and perfecting our intellectual and moral attributes. I only urge the point too frequently forgotten, *that the world was made for man, not man for the world*. And since experience clearly shows, that amidst the pressure of business and the occupations of society, especially in times so proverbially overwhelmed with the cares of life as our own, fair and just views of things beyond our daily routine scarcely find opportunity to suggest themselves, it is well that there should be some means of urging them upon our consideration.* It is

* A man's business is to relax and enjoy something natural if he expects to improve his mind or his heart; and of all sources of distraction, the worst is a continual moiling like a moudie (mole.)—*Diary of Sir Charles Bell*.

well that we should be occasionally brought to the reflection that it is 'neither wood, nor stones, nor the builder's art,' which make up the purposes and happiness of life, any more than they constitute the foundations of a state. In truth, in themselves considered, such things are equally and entirely worthless. The achievements of art, like the beauty and majesty of nature, are valuable only as exciting and encouraging the higher manifestations of the human character. The most exquisite picture; the marble nymph, who on airy tiptoe seems only just not to breathe and move; the heroic loveliness, which stands sublime over the slaughtered Python; what would they be, except as they stir in us the irresistible sentiments and emotions of our souls? It is thus only that they are valuable; and otherwise would be no more to us than the marbles of Petra to the wandering Arab. And it will be found, on consideration, that those things which are most valued in civilized society, owe their entire charm to a power of appreciation, which is fostered by the culture of our imaginative faculties, but which it is the tendency of a mechanical age to impair and finally destroy. A palace, no doubt, is intrinsically better than a wigwam; yet the Egyptian plasters his hovel of mud upon the very friezes of Thebes; and if a diamond and a jewel of colored glass were offered to the choice of a Pawnee maiden, there can be little question that she would select the most worthless. Indeed it is only that these things become truly valuable, as they educe from us our spiritual and inward nature. To show that it is really the affection of the soul which enlarges our capacity of enjoyment, and not the result of external culture, which is often nothing but the merest imitation, it is obvious, that the possession of all that is most beautiful or magnificent, either in art or nature, does not always involve the faculty even of their ordinary appreciation. From the meanest

hut of the wilderness may be born a soul, which drinks in, as it were, the very inward life of things, upon which the lord of marble pillars and staircases might gaze with unspeculative eyes; dead to their outward perfections, dead to their eternal promptings.

I might perhaps stop here, did I not feel irresistibly impelled to offer a few farther remarks in illustration of some of the suggestions of the Poem. It is to be regretted that the former fashion of prefixing a sort of index or argument to performances of this description has gone out of date, since it is fairly to be presumed, that what has cost the writer some pains to construct may require on the part of the reader some direction, in order fully to comprehend its bearing and intention.

It would be, perhaps, running too far counter to the commonly received opinions of society, to allege, that, to all just and true interests, it may be in reality retrograding, at the very moment when all the world is full of congratulations upon its onward progress. Yet that it is possible for society to descend from the highest point of refinement and civilization to a state of total ignorance and barbarism, there are so many melancholy examples in history, that the opinion need scarcely involve a paradox. Indeed, it seems almost impossible to avoid the conviction, that the world has grown strangely worldly; that much of that which appears best, is, in reality, fictitious; and that there is a singular lack of qualities, sentiments, and emotions, once much more prominent in society; which threw over it a grace; which elevated its character and kept it from its natural tendency to utter debasement; in fact, that many of those qualities would be more likely amongst us, to excite a sneer than admiration, which a true man might well count among his most honorable endowments.

Indeed, I think, that no one, whose mind is able to pierce

under the surface of things, can fail to perceive that there is something exceedingly wrong, at work upon the vital constitution of society ; that, in consequence of the allowances and qualifications of ordinary existence, by means of transmitted prejudice, and by the daily struggle of passion and self-interest, not sufficiently alleviated by juster influences, men have contrived to a singular degree to mystify themselves, ‘deceiving and being deceived ;’ that *right* is not so clear to our perceptions, *wrong* not so repulsive to our convictions, as would seem to become the professions of ‘an enlightened age.’* That truth has always had a hard battle with error in this world we well know. To a philosophical inquirer into the nature of good and evil, nothing can be more suprising, than that since moral and practical truth is obviously even for the temporal interest of mankind, virtue should need any enforcements to secure their deliberate obedience. But so it has ever been ; *virtus rectorem, ducemque desiderat ; vitia sine magistro discuntur.*

But while this has been the general condition of human soci-

* ‘But our existence as a community is a different thing from our existence either as individuals or families ; and an advance in civilization is not necessarily the same thing with an advance either in happiness or virtue. It does not even follow, as a matter of course, that, with a more submissive obedience to the law, and with actually a lower amount of what the law calls crime, (if it be true,) we are in a more healthy condition, either socially or politically. With less crime, there may be more vice ; the spirit of legality, to borrow a phrase from the theologians, may have weakened the spirit of liberty. Yet liberty and order, civilization and morality may in the highest degree exist together and in harmony, etc.’ — *Pictorial History of England, Vol. IV. 856.*

To this it may be added, that this same spirit of legality ; this formal abandonment of what some may consider open transgression, may tend to puff up the outer man with a strong sense of his own self-gratulatory goodness, while the inner man of the heart is, all the while, any thing but what he ought to be ; so that, into the *house which the wicked spirit findeth swept and garnished, he and seven other spirits more wicked than himself, enter and dwell there.*

ety, it would seem certain, that in all moral excellence, (I speak generally,) the present period exhibits indications of specific and exceeding degeneracy; that while the mind has advanced much in knowledge, the heart, by some strange inconsistency, has made rather a retrograde progress; in fact, that the consequence of intellectual pride has been a forgetfulness of moral duty. And if it should be suggested to me, that Horace, in his day, made a similar complaint as to the progressive degeneracy of the times, I can only reply, that the prophecy accompanying the complaint was speedily and terribly fulfilled.* Let him, who will, remember Tacitus and the historians and poets of his age, to this point.

And to those who remark, that this is only one of the 'phases of society,' and that things will eventually mend, I would merely suggest, with great deference, that, if competent minds, under such circumstances, do not apply themselves to the investigation of causes and effects; if, instead of endeavoring to sustain what is good, to repress what is evil, and to present to such as are doubtful the motives to a right direction, they permit themselves to be whirled along in the vortex,—there can be little hope of educing a better condition of society out of its present progress towards disorganization. To be what is called *hopeful*, without exerting ourselves for the melioration of things around us, appears to me like considering society a mere machine, and men in the light of puppets, controlled absolutely by some independent and extrinsic power. But society of itself has no recuperative energies. It is sustained, under Providence, only by those who think, speak and act well. It is composed of a great variety of individual members, upon the virtue and intelligence of each of whom the well-being of the whole structure depends. Let these become corrupted, and society dissolves.

* Carm. III. VI.

And just in proportion to their moral soundness is the associated mass in a condition of health, or in a state tending to anarchy and dissolution. To fold our hands, therefore, and be hopeful, when we observe the seeds of evil springing up to the stalk, would be like postponing the remedy for a cold until it had become aggravated into a fever.

In such an exigency, the best thing a moral writer can do, is, to endeavor to distinguish between the tendencies of the times and that which is abstractly and eternally *right*; and, at least, not to permit the recognized *standard* of virtue to fall below the level of its native and necessary perfection. In a practical age this is not easy; for just in the degree that society has determined, that what the best and highest imaginations have produced is unworthy their attention, it is evidence that it has, in a measure, shaken itself free of those sentiments and influences, which, more than any other human means, have averted its sensual and downward tendencies. And since what is called Imagination, which, when unadulterated, is Reason in its highest and best estate, has been cramped and fettered by the mechanical spirit of the time, yet cannot want food, as being an inherent quality of our nature; it has fed upon unwholesome husks and chaff, while cheated of its suitable repast. But, since the things which are about us, and our present existence itself, are evanescent and, in effect, therefore, unreal; and Imagination, when it is purest, deals with our spiritual and true nature, it should tend to the refinement and spiritualization of that within us, which is absolutely real and permanent.

With these preliminary remarks I submit the Poem to those for whose consideration it was prepared, and whose flattering opinions have encouraged its publication, and to the public award. I trust it may not prove the less acceptable to an enlightened judgment, that it contains no mysticism, or cloudy

philosophy, nor, so far as I am aware, any metaphysical absurdity whatever. Grave or gay, it is addressed to the good sense of those who are in the habit of sober thought. And that a poet should ever be understood to be forbidden to write *sense* in verse, is a megrim, which could have been conceived only in a very unpoetical age indeed. At all events, whether its speculations are to be counted really useful or otherwise, — amidst much modern literature which is worthless, and much more, I fear, which is absolutely pernicious, — they are at least ennobled by one distinction, that they present nothing which can make any mind more frivolous, or a single heart more corrupt.

CULTURE.

'T IS said some orator of ancient name
Chose for his theme Alcides and his fame ;
No axiom clearer, as he proved how great
Alcides, long beyond the reach of fate,
His labors ages o'er, and he confest
A demigod, secure, and with the blest !
'Till that shrewd stander-by, who seldom fails
To act his ready part in ancient tales,
(Deeming, perchance, an old renown, which long
Had woke the legend and inspired the song,
Scarce left much untried flight for fancy's wing,
But might be counted for a settled thing,)
Inquired, Why eulogize, since no man blamed
The hero all have praised and none defamed ?

Yet let me trust no question nice and sage,
Like this, shall scrutinize my modest page ;
A thankless quest it were for things unknown,
Since art and nature have so common grown ;

And oft in specious novelties we find
 Less fruit of judgment than a waste of mind ;
 As foam and fury do but serve to show
 How shallow, not how deep the stream below,
 Or distant rocks may shine like burnished gold,
 That, nearer seen, are barren, bleak and cold ;
 And well content, be mine the nobler praise,
 Old truths, though homely, to defend and raise.

CULTURE the theme that floats my strain along,
 A seemly subject for a generous song !
 Yet why require the dedicated rhyme
 To gild this flower and glory of the time ?
 Dulness is out of date, since science meets
 Compeers at all the corners of the streets ;
 Our sires were honest men, but had their day,
 And the green laurel has discrowned the gray ;
 They plucked the flower, but we enjoy the fruit, —
 A wise good world, indeed, 't is past dispute !
 The gauntlet fling of an enlightened age, —
 What venturous champion lifts the battle-gage ?

Yes, 't is an age of much pretence, indeed,
 Too much in haste to think, and yet we read ;
 This one the solid substance of reviews,
 And that, at least price-currents and the news !
 Or, since wild thoughts by worldly times are bred,
 As superstition reigns when faith is dead,

And folly, even in error, seeks relief
 From days too practical for sound belief,
 The struggling spirit, hard to be controlled,
 Bathes in transcendent dews its finer mould,
 And flows in oracles, whose thought intense
 Escapes the grasp of merely human sense!
 Yet while some Newgate felon's base career
 Or Gaul's wild nonsense draws the worthless tear,
 And many a speculation skims its round,
 The shallowest most when most it seems profound,
 How tedious grows the page, whose nobler art,
 Might wake the burning mind and swell the heart!

To some, indeed, a book were dull pretence,
 And learning's self might pass for lack of sense;
 Chained to the world's routine, that every day
 With labored effort seems but sadly gay,
 They feel no breezy speculations roll
 That stir the stagnant current of the soul,
 Nor fire of heaven, that will not come unsought,
 Upon their spirit's altar kindles thought.
 Were all like these, the world's unsocial face
 Had lacked the charm of every dearest grace;
 No cultured sweets had cheered the savage wild,
 Nor sovereign art on subject nature smiled.
 The wants of mere existence, few and small,
 The roamer of the waste supplies them all;

Were this enough, nor SOVEREIGN GOOD designed
 Expanding treasures for the opening mind,
 HE had not spread with beauties new and strange,
 The untrod mountain and the forest range ;
 Winged the sweet breath that dies in deserts rude,
 Or hung the lily trembling in the wood ;
 Bid the bright bell imbloomed in purple rise,
 Or living gold look up to lonely skies ;
 Dressed secret nature in her tangled bowers,
 And crowned her glorious with unheeded flowers !

No, 't is the course of heaven's ennobling plan,
 That Mind supreme shall vindicate the man,
 Bid him from cultured thought enjoyment draw,
 And find his happiness his being's law !
 Rob him of this, behold he naked stands
 A tented Arab on his parching sands ;
 Or roams a wanderer through the lonely woods
 Where rock-born Oregon rolls down his floods ;
 Or, still barbarian in the haunts of men,
 The spire-crowned city as the mountain-den,
 The wretch to nature's best emotions cold,
 The train of folly and the slave of gold.

But this the triumph of eternal mind,
 That levels to its worth all human kind,
 Asserts its own great element of birth
 And keeps it sovereign over subject earth.

This tears away the filmy veil that clings,
 A floating shadow, round the shows of things ;
 From cultured life averts that fixed control,
 Mere matter's empire in the untaught soul ;
 Rates at its value fortune's gilded dower,
 And wrings the truncheon from the grasp of power ;
 Selfish and social evil dares disarm,
 And gives life all its value and its charm ;
 Fills it with objects worthy life's command,
 Gleams in the eye and guides the curious hand.
 This flings the sunbeam on thy dusky sails,
 That risk the ventures of a thousand gales,
 Throbs in the lordly merchant's crowded mart,
 And swells the manly seaman's sterling heart ;
 This rears the stately dome, the marbled hall,
 And breathes with genius on the pictured wall ;
 Gives to the flying car its headlong force,
 And speeds the ocean-steamer on her course ;
 'Through varied life's ascending channel flows,
 And builds a temple where a hovel rose !

Not that a palace shields the loftiest head
 More than the rudest cottar's mountain-shed ;
 Nor that the lake and stream and hill afford
 Less plenteous fare than decks the daintiest board ;
 But that a wider empire has been wrought
 By all the sage conceived, the poet thought !

In ocean's isles, beneath the orient beam,
 A nail were richer than an ingot's gleam ;
 And the red huntress, on her native wild,
 Of gewgaws vain, the prairie's simple child !
 Thinks the poor toys her jetty tresses deck
 Rich as the pearls on beauty's fairer neck.
 'Tis conquering genius gilds the dazzling prize
 That lures the eager and attracts the wise ;
 And gold itself, this right the world makes wrong,
 Owes half its magic to the poet's song !
 But for his lay and what the musing sage
 Speaks to the spirit, on the living page,
 No fairy hand had dressed the sylvan waste,
 Nor generous culture bloomed in realms of taste ;
 As clouds have veiled the light of other days,
 And man forever sinks where thought decays,
 We still had roamed, to art and nature blind,
 Nor grace had charmed, nor fancy cheered the mind !

What though the sophist choose his idle theme,
 And weave of untaught bliss the empty dream ;
 By cultured paths we reach the gates of truth
 That guard the waters of immortal youth,
 And find the key, harmonious to unfold
 Those pearly portals to the fount of gold ;
 Learn that first science, fit to be pursued,
 To shun the evil and discern the good,

And all that else can fill the noble mind,
That courts not marble nor invites the wind.

And though the world its motley livery wears,
Nor clasps its pleasures closer than its cares,
Thrifless it were to lose what life we call,
If cares or pleasures should absorb it all;
To fold the pinions of our native flight,
And sit in darkness with the brooding night.

Far nobler hopes the generous mind inspire
And warm its purpose with a holier fire;
This life, a sullen tide, resistless flows,
Whose secret depths no sounding plummet knows;
The surface bright with hues of purpling bloom,
Beneath, the chambers of an unknown gloom;
And since, while round the flowery bank we play,
Some under-current sweeps us quite away,
It were but wise to estimate the worth
Of our great heirship of immortal birth;
To clasp some buoyant thing no waves control,
Nor give the world the mastery of the soul.

And we, immortal-born and charter-free
To shape our course across this boundless sea,
Freighted with hopes of more exceeding worth
Than all that dazzles and bewilders earth,

Say, shall we float, secure but lost, along,
 Lulled by the treacherous wave's deceitful song,
 Mark the perfidious shoal, where breakers roar,
 Yet strand the ship upon the fatal shore?
 Or crowd our canvass to the favoring wind,
 Leave the false seas and siren-isles behind,
 Frail but yet safe our bark, that still for home
 Bounds on her course and cuts the dreadless foam,
 Mounts o'er the wave and catches, as she springs,
 Heaven's opening glories on her streaming wings!

These outward things that life's poor wishes bend,
 The wise man's means and only folly's end,
 Fame, fortune, power, and all their shifting train,
 That cheat our giddy race and cheat in vain,
 Swift as the scud, that o'er the brightening moon
 Scarce veils her face, it sweeps away so soon,
 No grasp could firmly hold since time began,
 These borrowed trappings of the nobler man.

No statesman crowned with all his hope could yield,
 No conquering soldier on the fiery field,
 No merchant-prince, whose laden galleons glide
 Safe to their haven with the smiling tide;
 But own, beyond the moment's bliss enjoyed,
 Some rising wish and still recurring void,
 Not conquest fills, nor empire's regal robe,
 Nor all the glistening bullion of the globe.

And where this bounding, brimming, sparkling life
 Veils the heart-fever and the spirit's strife,
 O'er the bright bubble and the dancing foam
 Unwelcome clouds will fall and shadows come ;
 The fibres fail — the nerves relaxing jar,
 And the soul sickens in the selfish war.
 But if an inner shrine the spirit knows,
 Thither it turns and seeks no vain repose,
 As hearts that feel their mortal cares decay,
 In the sweet stillness of the sabbath-day.

And if the mind its copious draughts inspire
 At the pure fountains of perennial fire,
 By generous lore and manly thought supplied,
 That gush a living and exhaustless tide ;
 Unshaken still and incorrupt it stands,
 And gathered force its native strength expands,
 And finds such sober solace of delight
 Sweeten the day and sanctify the night.
 Sustained by this the soul replumes its wing ;
 Absent, and life, methinks a cheerless thing,
 Has scarce a show to sadden o'er its stage
 Like worldly manhood shrunk to vacant age !

Walpole, avowed upon the file of fame
 By every muse, at least a doubtful name ;
 Driven from the politician's jobbing trade,
 When faction had unmade what first it made,

Relieved from base corruption's servile art,
 Felt life a burthen at his stagnant heart;
 Looked on its varnish with a jaundiced eye
 And dared pronounce all history a lie;
 Though long ere Hume his James or Charles had
 shown,
 Or Alison had writ republics down!
 With much still left to dignify decline,
 In listless solitude preferred to pine;
 Found not for him that peace in Houghton's bowers
 Which breathes o'er forests and exhales from flowers;
 Threw *books* away, and 'mid ennui and gout
 Fretted and sighed life's lingering taper out!

Fit retribution for the falsely great,
 When false ambition justifies its fate,
 The cankered mind by treacherous doubts misled,
 And withered laurels for a withering head!
 Better the German Cesar's beads to tell,
 And find enough for empire in a cell;
 Or, with Gaul's captive eagle, clank his chain
 Chimed to the surge beyond the hopeless main!
 Even Hastings, rich in spoils of guilty gold,
 Ransom of ruined states and princedoms sold,
 Shook from his heart, beneath the tropic sun,
 The staggering curse of power unjustly won,
 And gave his mind, what power but rarely yields,
 To studious leisure in his native fields;

Asked of the muse to breathe round nature's close
 Some sacred whisper, friendly to repose,
 And half forgot, enchanted with her tone,
 All plundered India's universal groan!

And thou, whose tardy spring no blossoms cheer,
 But all seems winter-season in thy year,
 Let thy worn heart throb backwards to its prime,
 And breathe some spirit of the summer time!
 What though the world's unspiritual cares
 To narrow thoughts would bound and mean affairs,
 O pause awhile, ere yet the jostling strife
 Crumble this baseless scaffolding of life,
 And homeward win those thoughts that charmed away,
 With golden dreams thy childhood's holiday!
 But yet, to keep the conscience undefiled,
 'The judgment clear, nor reason's self beguiled,
 Seek not the flippant and debasing page,
 That marks the trivial humor of the age,
 And fain would leave us little to deplore,
 When steadfast thought and feeling are no more.

Nor yet devote thy whole of studious days
 'To Fancy's themes which innocence might praise,
 Whose purer thoughts in flowery bands have knit
 The heart of genius to the soul of wit.
 Life, unamused, were scarcely worth its price,
 And care-worn virtue lives next door to vice;

But to give all to pastime would control
 The sober instincts of the reasoning soul.
 As wine, that often bids the heart expand,
 And full of bounty prompts the open hand,
 A generous thing, indeed, if used aright,
 Perverted, clouds the mind and dims the sight.

But since our virtues only live by toil,
 While vice spontaneous springs in every soil,
 Would you, betimes, a solid barrier form
 Against life's follies and confront its storm,
 With balanced powers well-rallied to resist
 The banded charlatan and sciolist, —
 On the world's ample annals, deep and vast,
 Rich in the wise experience of the past,
 Muse to some end, as mingle with thy dreams
 Earth's highest objects, Heaven's ennobling themes!
 Or dwell with sage philosophies, that find
 And sound the well-springs of the human mind;
 Nor vainly judging that the noblest art,
 By genius swayed to raise and mend the heart,
 Enraptured hang upon the living line
 Which kings and statesmen long have deemed divine,
 Victorious yet to glorify a throne,
 Or vest a hut with graces all its own!
 Or turn, as turned from Mersey's burthened tide,
 Triumphant trade, its glitter and its pride,

Roscoe, no slave to sordid splendor sold
 And bent, a pilgrim, at the shrines of old ;
 Saw the advancing morn with softening light,
 Dissolve the shade and melt incumbent night,
 When first reviving Learning's orient day
 Shone on ten gloomy centuries rolled away,
 And drew such colors from the gorgeous scene
 As told the story of the Florentine.

And though our era, grown too strangely wise,
 Rejects the Past, the Present deifies,
 And Time's old oracles to ruin hurled,
 Confound a restless and unstable world ;
 And our new hariolations might approve
 As well the Delphian as the Orphic grove,
 So close allied to heathendom their aim,
 So little kindred to the christian name !
 Though our presumptuous, vain and heady youth
 Quite overrides the humble graybeard, Truth !
 Of this be certain, for a lesson tried,
 If human pride be weakness, such our pride ;
 In spite of prophets most profoundly blind,
 A circling limit bounds the human mind ;
 And mysteries still our sons shall mysteries know,
 As Plato knew, two thousand years ago ;
 Still, darkly bright, the folded cloud embrace
 Glories too great for mortals face to face !

And, as the rustic by the flowing tide
 Waited, vain fool! to find its channels dried,
 So men, 'till heaven's secure foundation nods,
 May wait, and dream, but never can be gods!

And since brave men and many, long before
 King Agamemnon, trod the Trojan shore,
 It were no stretch of reason to conclude
 Men quite as wise as we, perhaps, as good,
 Breathed, thought and felt in Age's primal time,
 Who sleep forgotten by the sacred rhyme;
 Had questioned nature in her secret cells,
 And sounded inspiration's deepest wells;
 Knew all we know, what force mysterious guides
 The world-old wonder of the rolling tides;
 As well how flames Aurora's polar ray,
 And the sweet marvel of the Milky Way;
 By what strange fire the red volcano gleams,
 On what wild path the spectral comet streams!
 Yes, though with added wings o'er earth we fly,
 No art too deep, nor science seem too high,
 Just such as we, the fools of human pride,
 Vaunted their feeble strength and heaven defied!
 On Shinar heaved the ponderous tower in vain,
 Their nameless fabrics piled on Cairo's plain;
 Unerring drew each constellated star,
 The Zodiac-gems of desert Denderah;

For the wise monarch reared with unknown skill
 The noiseless stones on Zion's templed hill,
 And wrought the pillared rock that crowns in state
 The Idumean road by Bozrah's gate!
 How shamed the feebler labors of our hands
 By gray memorials strewn o'er well-sung lands!
 As looks a monarch from his living crowd
 Less awful than a beggar in his shroud,
 No living art like that which desert glooms
 Show great in ruin, glorious in their tombs.

Thy moral nature may advancing rise
 And claim its lost perfection in the skies;
 But check the better soul's aspiring wing
 And the mind's progress is a fearful thing!
 If kinder feeling win no added grace,
 Our best refinements only make us base.
 Round Reason's shrine the mad Parisian trod,
 And polished Athens served an unknown God;
 But hell's dark precincts can reveal alone
 The whole that mind without a heart has done!
 And though thy keels come laden to the shore,
 With freight more precious than the virgin ore;
 Thine ivory halls with diamonds shine inlaid,
 And peerless porphyry build thy colonnade;
 Though thy capacious intellect has wrought
 Consummate perfectness from subtle thought,

And all earth, sea and sky could teach thee, hung
 With all an angel's accents on thy tongue ;
 Be these the boasted glories of the State,
 And faithful Time has chronicled its fate ;
 Nor wealth, power, grandeur, earth's unstable all
 That ever built an empire stayed its fall !

I ask no veil, by vague abstraction wrought,
 To cloud the purpose of transparent thought ;
 The soul's unfilled desires shall bid it pant,
 Till a true culture meet the social want,
 Nor needs the student of the heathen page
 Blush for the virtues of a christian age.
 Let smooth-tongued disputants, in grave debate,
 Phrase round and round the world's 'transition-state ;'
 The social mind with reasoning circles wake,
 As boys with pebbles stir a sleeping lake ;
 Look with his eyes who saw the laboring sun,
 And said, 't is only a phenomenon.'
 But in a changeful world of wild unrest,
 The *end of 'movement'* were the graver quest !
 To ask if life improve, or 'progress' nurse
 The world's old illness into something worse ;
 Not speculate with folded arms, but feel
 Each good man's effort must secure its weal.

And ere that day approach, which Heaven forefend,
 (The doting world declining to its end,)

When social life's corrupted forces draw
 Relaxing morals down with loosened law ;
 And standard Truth, almost immoral grown,
 Each witling makes a standard of his own ;
 When cold refinements fritter faith away,
 Nor tested honor hides the true assay ;
 The statesman's heart by venal schemes engrossed,
 The rich man's conscience slumbering at its post ;
 The common mind by countless follies vexed,
 And the world's heart bewildered and perplexed ;
 Though, in this fiery conflict, never still,
 Waged on the powers of good by powers of ill,
 All Armageddon's adverse ranks combine,
 If one firm phalanx hold our shaking line, —
 Then, as the leader of a wavering host
 Must snatch the moment, or the field is lost,
 And risking all, his more than all to gain,
 He flings his last battalion on the plain, —
Then were the time for every manly breast
 To try this issue, nobly worth the test, —
 Has God ordained, or does but man pervert
 Expanding power of good to fatal hurt ?
 Is knowledge, Evil — Vice refinement's sway ?
 Must Wealth corrupt and Empire be Decay ?

Count not my verse too serious or too free,
 Poets are moralists, or ought to be ;

It is the high prerogative of rhyme,
 With sounding truth to moralize the time ;
 And they, like prophets, should be very bold,
 Who rouse the dull and animate the cold ;
 And thus inspired, their names, in every age,
 Stand out the brightest on the brightest page.
 'T is the time's cant to scorn the muse's wing,
 And reckon verse, at best, an idle thing,
 Though, in a world of fading dreams, alone
 She makes them brighter, or revives them gone !
 'Tis some excuse, when poets by their song
 Scarce help to vindicate the muse's wrong,
 Stoop to their age, its judgment antedate,
 And bending to the sentence court their fate.

And ours, I fear, is no heroic time,
 For honor, truth, love, manhood, and the rhyme ;
 And oft, when all responsive chords are mute,
 The heart but faints upon the dying lute.
 Curtius himself, were he alive again,
 Unsung might leap the yawning gulph in vain,
 And scarce would ring to strains of chorded joy
 Another Helen in another Troy !
 O, that some breath of heaven's diviner glow,
 Full of the tuneful soul of long ago,
 Might sweep this tideless wave, so icy cold,
 And stir our buried hearts with thoughts of old !

And ye, to whom in vain the fields appear,
 When flowers and sunshine dress the varied year,
 And vainly rings in melody along
 The careless carol of the wild-bird's song;
 Who pine amid the city's feverish fret,
 And feel life wear away one long regret,
 Forever grasping at some gilded sin,
 The prize but lost to lure the hope to win;
 Whose restless toils, that task the laboring heart,
 Crowd out the reeling brain's diviner part;
 Who mar too soon God's glorious image, lent
 With noble powers, for every high intent,
 Nor find the green old age whose calm repays
 Obedient wishes and contented days;
 Would that my verse, in nature's languid hours,
 Might come like incense of untoiling flowers,
 Some roundelay of careless birds might bring,
 Stored in the garnered heart of memory's spring!

And ye, who float along those shining bowers,
 Where mirth and music wing the roseate hours,
 Whose thoughts, if thoughts they be, intrusive time
 Cheat with unmeaning prose and vapid rhyme;
 Though no wild fancy flaunt along my line,
 The harp-strings answer to a voice divine!
 Behold a field where one but weeds shall meet,
 While others pluck the wild-flowers at their feet,

A rugged quarry, rough with truth unknown,
 Where this one finds a gem and that a stone.
 And oh, in realms which beauty deigns to grace,
 If lay like mine may dare assert a place,
 Though flattery scarcely on the measure swell
 Nor strains melodious court a golden shell, —
 Yet there, last hope! still reign the muse's art,
 To fling no vain enchantment round the heart,
 There still the power, unselfish and supreme,
 Throw all life knows of magic o'er the dream!
 And, as of old, the valiant knight in arms
 His treasure found in virtue joined with charms,
 And beauty scorned the selfish thought that weighed
 Her and her dowry by the laws of trade,
 Be still one priceless thing beneath the sky,
 A woman's heart, which gold can never buy!

And thou, fair city of the western wave,
 Built on the forest-hunter's vanished grave,
 Thou, whose whole story is a lesson taught,
 How vanquished nature yields to conquering thought!
 As down their vista all thy years unveil,
 Fain would my heart prophetic read thy tale!
 A richer wealth than sea-born Venice bore,
 A nobler dower than golden Florence wore,
 No art has wrought it and no price can buy
 With Ophir's wedge, or Tyre's imperial dye, —


Daughters to grace and sons that build the state
 With deep foundations laid exempt from fate,
 Virtue its wealth and stable blessing given,
 Would man accept it, from indulgent Heaven!

O, law of happiness, misunderstood!
 O, vague ideal of substantial good!
 O game of life, that played with skill would tend
 To win this solid prize, its real end;
 Find the lost Good, so long by sages sought,
 Life's simplest lesson and its brightest thought,
 That makes us happy only as we move
 In sober concert with the law of love,
 And happiness impossible to find
 In the mean purpose of the grovelling mind!
 Thus to perfect, in heaven's eternal plan,
 That noble thing, a thinking, feeling man,
 No talent wasted and no duty left,
 Nor life a vacant dream of hope bereft;
 For this to live, and oh, for this to die,
 Since earth has nothing further worth a sigh,
 Oh, win true culture, worth immortal toil,
 Nor lose thyself, the world's too easy spoil!

But since, like flowers that spring beneath our feet,
 Our duties lie around us fresh and sweet,
 These to embellish and adorn with grace,
 Bear every wreath away, in every race;

Seek wealth, if riches can afford thee rest,—
Power, if one human heart it ever blest,—
Yet be not like those combatants unwise,
Who snatch the glory but neglect the prize;
Nor like the hireling soldier, for his pay,
But some fair leaf of honor take away;
Act with the just, the generous and the brave,
Toil for the world, its master not its slave;
Be that reformer, true as well as warm,
Whose chief ambition is his own reform;
Prepare thy harness, knightly-proof, and strive,
With manful spirit, to keep life alive,
And make it thoughtful, but as sweet and bright,
As summer moonrise on the sober night;
Or like the fireside of thy hopes and fears,
Where sunshine congregates with all thy tears!
And though around thee every hollow breath
Of the world's surges hoarsely murmur, 'Death!'
Thy soul shall still, heard through the stormy strife,
Toned to a sweeter cadence, whisper, 'Life!'

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